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HISTORY OF  
Old Fourth Creek Meeting-House  
1764 - 1939  
NOW THE  
First Presbyterian Church  
OF  
STATESVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA



By  
MRS. MINNIE HAMPTON ELIASON

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

The University of Chicago is a private research university in Chicago, Illinois. It was founded in 1837 and is one of the oldest and most prominent universities in the United States. The university is known for its rigorous academic standards and its commitment to research and scholarship.

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## HISTORY OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

the Rev. John Thompson came "upon his feet and in his hand a staff" all the way from Pennsylvania to "drawen to hevене by fairnesse, by good ensample." Once when he stopped for the night, his host said, "Son, go put up Mr. Thompson's horse," but Mr. Thompson smiled a really quizzical grin and said, "Thank you, but I've already hitched him behind the hall door".

As a side-line, he took out grants of choice land for friends back in Pennsylvania. The Swann family in Cool Spring still has the grant obtained for them by this wide-awake gentleman. However, his real work was telling "the old, old story" to families long out of reach of a meeting-house.

About two miles northeast of where Statesville now is, there was "a stand" with a slab between two white oaks on which the Bible and a bucket of water with a gourd were placed and, of course, a tuning fork and a catechism, for this minister taught his congregation the catechism. Here the Rev. John Thompson dispensed the words of Life to hungry souls who thought it a blessing to listen to a sermon *hours* long. They listened and learned not only "the old, old story", but the doctrines of the Presbyterian church and, blessing him for coming, took courage even if the Indians did creep down their narrow creek and now and then scalp somebody.

In 1775 Governor Dobbs sent Captain Hugh Waddell to build Fort Dobbs and here these pioneers found safety through the perilous years between 1755 and 1760. Even so, there was another stand "near the creek and further east" where services were held by such missionaries as McMordie, Donaldson, Wilson, Kenan, and Brainerd.

This certificate, yellowed with age, is still carefully preserved: "That James Hall and his wife Prudence Hall hath lived in this congregation ever since it was erected and heave behaved themselves Cristianly and soberly without any publicke scandal known to us and have been partakers of sealing ordinances amongst us and may be received into any Cristian society wherever God in his providence shall order their lott is certified this 20th day of August 1751 by the Session of Conewago (Pennsylvania).

(Signed) Thomas Bowman  
Robert Mordah  
James Mordah  
Hugh Hall  
John McQueen".

## HISTORY OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

James Hall, Sr., was clearing his southeast field (still in use) when a courier brought in the news of Braddock's defeat. For five years after Fort Dobbs was built the French and Indian war caused much trouble to these settlers. Colonel Alexander Osborne with his company of seventy-nine pioneers was ranging to the west of Fort Dobbs to clear the country of Indians. Captain Thomas Allison, Lieutenants William Luckie, Andrew Smith, John McWhorter, John Oliphant and Hugh Montgomery, members of Fourth Creek Congregation (now First Presbyterian Church of Statesville), were put out after the Indians.

Book 2, Register of Deeds, Salisbury, N. C., Page 259, bears this record: "Fergus Sloan and his wife, Elizabeth, sell for five shillings  $\frac{3}{4}$  acres between 3rd and 4th creeks and Buffalo Creek which empties into 4th Creek (except a family burying ground) to Robert Simonton, Thomas Allison, Samuel Thornton, Patrick Duffie, and William Simonton on January 7, 1758, (the original grant being to John Oliphant from whom Fergus Sloan had bought it in 1753.) The plan was to build the meeting house near this family graveyard. Logs were placed there for the building. It must have been here that the Thanksgiving Day meeting was held under the appointment of Governor Dobbs one Wednesday in December 1758, though our trouble with the Indians was not over.

A small log meeting house with split log seats was built in a beautiful oak grove on the hill near what is now the northeast corner of the old rock walled graveyard. At the foot of the hill was a clear, free-flowing spring from which water was carried for church services as late as the boyhood of Mr. John McRorie. In the brook flowing from this spring, girls who had walked eight or ten miles to meeting, bathed their feet and donned their Sunday-go-to-Meeting socks and shoes. They climbed the hill to sit demurely through a sermon hours long.

In 1764 the Rev. Elihu Spencer and the Rev. Alexander McWhorter came from Philadelphia on a mission to Center and Fourth Creek. In this year Fourth Creek Church was formally organized by Mr. Spencer. Both Mr. Spencer and Mr. McWhorter were interested in Crowfield Academy that had been organized near Center in 1760. Here Ephriam Brevard, Adlai Osborne and James Hall were prepared for Princeton's Nassau Hall. By 1773 there were 196 families in Fourth Creek Congregation and when the Rowan County Committee of Safety met in Salisbury to draw up "resolutions to unite in an indissoluble union and association to oppose by every just and proper







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## HISTORY OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

means the infringement of their common rights and privileges", John Purviance, John Nesbit, Ninian Steele, John Sloan, John Archibald, David Caldwell, Samuel Harris, Jacob Nichols, Samuel Reed, John Montgomery, William Sharpe and Robert King were members from Fourth Creek Congregation. This committee was the beginning of the Revolutionary war in Rowan County. Revolutionary vouchers still on record in Raleigh archives show that among those listed for militia service were Fergus Sloan, Robert Hill, Thomas Hall and William Stevenson, these being only a few of those on record.

April 8, 1778, James Hall, having finished his collegiate course and studied divinity under the great Dr. Witherspoon, came back to become pastor of Fourth Creek, Concord and Bethany. In 1780, a new log meeting house, 40x80 feet was built in the grove on the hill. (Probably through the efforts of James and Robert Simonton, it was ceiled and weather-boarded in 1812.) James Hall took his congregation from this meeting house to Cowan's Ford and tho' offered the post of brigadier-general as General Davidson's successor, he brought his Fourth Creek people back to pray in the beautiful oak grove. Dr. Archibald Henderson says, "The seal of the Christian martyr is stamped upon his character from early manhood; for the self-less passion for complete and undivided service to God drove him to the harsh step of giving up the beloved woman, Eliza Sloan, upon whom his heart was fixed," and here again he is refusing an honor the like of which was accepted by two other Revolutionary ministers. In 1790, he gave up Fourth Creek and Concord, giving the remainder of his days (he ceased active work in 1816) to Bethany, his schools and to missionary journeys to far waste places, (he died in 1826). Hall county, in Georgia, is named for him because he held its first religious services.

Next to spiritual ministry comes bodily, yet, Dr. John Fergus, for a short time stationed at Fort Dobbs, was the only professional helper in sickness. For many years, two women, Elizabeth Robinson, wife of Fergus Sloan, and Jane Hall McEwen, sister and home-maker for Dr. James Hall, were the stand-bys in time of pain. There were footlogs across creeks and branches for their especial use.

In 1793, Louis Feuilletan Wilson, a finished scholar and a lovely Christian gentleman, became pastor of Fourth Creek. He was college mate and friend of James Hall, and both were greatly interested in the revival that was spreading all over the country. Hall and Wilson went to the great revival in Ran-



## HISTORY OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

dolph County, taking with them a large group from Fourth Creek and Bethany. Elder John McLelland became bitterly opposed to physical excitement accompanying conversions because the young people of Fourth Creek were becoming enthusiastic over the exciting camp-meetings and, on conversion, were leaving Fourth Creek, Concord and Bethany for the more thrilling Methodist Church recently organized at the home of Peter Claywell on Snow Creek by Daniel Asbury, who preached there in 1801 and 1802. William Stevenson said, "If it is not of the Lord it will come to naught" and advised against opposition. Foote gives this as the reason for Fourth Creek being without a minister from 1803 to 1823 though Dr. E. McCorkle, Dr. James McRae and the Rev. John M. Irvin and the Rev. John Mushat were stated supplies from 1804 to 1822, the last named being an A.R.P. and a school teacher of note.

The Rev. Daniel Gould was pastor from 1823 to 1828 and Zilpha Gould had our first school for girls in the Session House. They played "hide and seek" in the graveyard, often frightening "the seeker" by making sepulchral groans as they hid behind tombstones.

Rev. Daniel Gould's tombstone in Fourth Creek burying ground bears this testimony that "he preached with fidelity," and was "the steady, indefatigable friend of the Bible cause,—he fell asleep in Christ on the 29th day of April, 1854, in the 45th year of his age."

The Rev. Robert Caldwell was pastor from 1829 to 1832, dying when he was only twenty-seven. He was laid to rest in Fourth Creek graveyard and "the congregation, in token of the regard in which they held his memory," erected a neat tombstone over his grave. From 1833 to 1840 the congregation was ministered to by Reverends J. J. McCutchan, Samuel Paisley and Jesse Rankin. During Mr. Paisley's ministry we have the record of our first "Chapel" of which James Montgomery, David Montgomery, and Adam L. Allison were appointed elders. We have this notation in regard to this chapel: "We believe it proper here to remark that these last were appointed in a wing of our congregation where we have a separate place of worship about 7 1-2 miles from our church at Statesville called New Union. It is all in Fourth Creek of which they are a part." Now, Front Street and Park Place Chapels have become organized churches. These churches began as Sunday Schools conducted by Ruling Elders E. B. Stimson, of blessed memory, and F. A. Sherrill, who is with us and has served

The following is a list of the names of the members of the American Medical Association, as reported in the official directory for the year 1914. The names are arranged in alphabetical order, and are given in full, including the name of the state or territory in which the member resides. The names are given in the order in which they appear in the directory, and are not necessarily in the order of their rank or position in the association.

1. Dr. J. C. Smith, Chicago, Ill.

2. Dr. W. H. Jones, New York, N. Y.

3. Dr. E. D. Brown, Boston, Mass.

4. Dr. F. G. White, Philadelphia, Pa.

5. Dr. A. B. Black, St. Louis, Mo.

6. Dr. C. D. Green, San Francisco, Cal.

7. Dr. H. I. Hall, New Orleans, La.

8. Dr. J. K. King, Portland, Me.

9. Dr. L. M. Lee, Baltimore, Md.

10. Dr. N. O. Long, Little Rock, Ark.

11. Dr. P. Q. Reed, Kansas City, Mo.

12. Dr. R. S. Taylor, Cincinnati, O.

13. Dr. T. U. Vance, Memphis, Tenn.

14. Dr. V. W. Webb, Louisville, Ky.

15. Dr. X. Y. Wright, Indianapolis, Ind.

16. Dr. Z. A. Adams, Des Moines, Ia.

17. Dr. B. C. Baker, Omaha, Neb.

18. Dr. D. E. Clark, Denver, Colo.

19. Dr. F. H. Cook, Salt Lake City, Utah.

20. Dr. G. I. Davis, Phoenix, Ariz.

21. Dr. J. L. Evans, Albuquerque, N. M.

22. Dr. K. M. Foster, Santa Fe, N. M.

23. Dr. L. N. Gibson, Las Vegas, Nev.

24. Dr. M. O. Hall, Reno, Nev.

25. Dr. P. Q. Harris, Carson City, Nev.

26. Dr. R. S. Jones, Sacramento, Cal.

27. Dr. T. U. King, San Jose, Cal.

28. Dr. V. W. Lee, Fresno, Cal.

29. Dr. X. Y. Long, Stockton, Cal.

30. Dr. Z. A. Reed, Modesto, Cal.

31. Dr. B. C. Taylor, Yuba City, Cal.

32. Dr. D. E. Vance, Marysville, Cal.

33. Dr. F. H. Webb, Eureka, Cal.

34. Dr. G. I. Wright, Astoria, Ore.

35. Dr. H. I. Adams, Seaside, Ore.

36. Dr. J. K. Baker, Astoria, Ore.

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## HISTORY OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

longer than any other of our officers now living.

In 1840, the Rev. E. F. Rockwell, "one of the most learned preachers of his time, an antiquarian and great theologian," became pastor of Fourth Creek and for ten years ministered to his people, interested in every detail of their lives. His sermons were written carefully on one side of the paper; later used for taking history notes, especially from Miss Nancy McKee and Aunt Margaret Stevenson Houpt. He loved little children and often laid his hand in benediction on some small head. While he was pastor in 1849, contributions were made to the Washington National Monument Society of which there were members in the congregation, one certificate signed by L. Taylor, President," is intact, a proud heirloom to possess when one looks at the tall shaft in Washington's own city, and realizes our church helped build it. Dr. Rockwell resigned the pastorate to become a professor at Davidson College. Later in his life he was pastor of Fifth Creek and Bethany.

The Rev. P. H. Dalton, our next pastor, (1851 to 1856), had two unusual events to mark his ministry. First, the construction of our college for girls, then the storm, when the minister was leading a funeral procession and they had to set the coffin down in the public square and run for shelter. This same storm made it necessary to rebuild this college from the foundation, but, completed, it has been a benediction to our whole community and is still one of the few buildings of classic beauty in North Carolina.

Dr. Walter W. Pharr, "a large, fine, benevolent man with most impressive voice and manner," was pastor from 1857 to 1869. By this time there were handsome carriages in the grove and many saddle horses of swift, sure gait as well as the best Conastoga wagons—Fourth Creek no longer walked to Church. Dr. T. E. Anderson gives a graphic picture of this great log church in its prime: "The Old Fourth Creek Presbyterian Church was our chief architectural pride, beautifully located in a grove of splendid oak trees. To me, with its belfry and ample size, its interior graced by lofty pulpit and a gallery for the colored contingent, seats with doors at the end, rising amphitheater-like, one slightly above the other, with individual owners, fulfilled my highest conceptions. But the lofty overhead ceiling, with its curving boards, a masterpiece of workmanship, held my gaze the longest and greatly relieved the tedium of the long drawn out sermon, as I sat with my feet not touching the floor in my grandmother's pew."



## HISTORY OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

In this church on a May Sunday of 1865, a little girl kept watch while the pastor prayed. She saw a lady leaning forward with bowed head instead of standing as all Presbyterians were supposed to do. The lady was Mrs. Zebulon B. Vance.

Federal officers had just come and arrested her husband, taking him away to Washington. This church was a grand place for children to play, the pews being hiding places safe from the enemy and the neighboring children used it for such purposes frequently. In the gallery on Sunday a class of negroes was taught by a lovely young lady, who lived to be eighty-nine and continued her good work.

The first brick church, costing \$8,000.00, was built in 1863, but the tower was never completed. Auntie Foster said: There was a large brick church of colonial type with high windows on the sides, windows reaching from the galleries down to the main floor of the church. This building stood on the opposite side of Meeting Street from the present location and faced toward Broad Street. It was built during Dr. Pharr's ministry. "Dr. Wood preached his first sermon here in 1869. Soon after this it was judged unsafe and the congregation decided to build on the present site." Dr. Wood became our pastor in 1869 and he watched the building of the little red Gothic brick church from the material of the first church, Col. S. A. Sharpe being the contractor. This church was dedicated Dec. 31, 1870, the Rev. E. F. Rockwell delivering the dedicatory address.

In this little church, the first I ever knew and still a lovely thing to me, Dr. Wood led his people to the throne of God.

The choir was in the gallery with Mrs. Annie Moore Cowan at the organ and such singers as Mrs. Juliet Moore Cowles, Miss Em Bell, Miss Maggie Stimson, Messrs. Pink Burke, Harvey Morrison and Francis Stevenson. Here Mr. Chas. E. Mills began his faithful work as Director of Music for the Church. Choirs change in 30 years. Young voices joined it and Mrs. Annie's niece became organist. The congregation became too large for the building, which was torn down. The fifth church, also of brick and on the same site, was finished in the early nineties. It was dedicated November 22, 1896. Two sons of the church, Revs. R. D. Stimson and Ernest Caldwell, took part in the service. Dr. Caldwell preached and Dr. Wood offered the dedicatory prayer on this joyous occasion. The Hallelujah Chorus was sung by the Choir.







## HISTORY OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Two of the most distinguished members of this church were Miss Jane Caldwell, keeper of the church grounds, and her brother, Joseph Pearson Caldwell. They were children of our second member of Congress and great-grandchildren of the Hon. William Sharpe, who drew the map of Fourth Creek Congregation in 1773. The catechism and Bible verses that were memorized in this little red brick church would please even the Rev. John Thompson. During Dr. Wood's serious illness, the session employed the Rev. John Brice Cochran as pastor until Dr. Wood was well enough to preach again. Mr. Cochran was a good soldier of the cross and faithful to his duties. Mrs. R. D. Grier, his daughter, is now a worker in our church. His son-in-law, Mr. R. D. Grier, is our Sunday School Superintendent. His grand-daughter sings in the choir. His works follow him.

During Dr. Wood's last illness, Dr. A. J. McKelway was stated supply, serving 1899-1900. Dr. Raynal's tribute to Dr. Wood follows:

"The Rev. Dr. William A. Wood succeeded to the pastorate in 1869. He was a native of Rowan County and a graduate of Princeton. He served here for thirty years and he will always be remembered as one of the best loved men in the history of the North Carolina Church. Scholarly, gentle, and fervent, he was a preacher of great power, and as a pastor he was every man's friend. He became the spiritual father of the whole community and much of the civil and cultural character of Statesville must be regarded as his ministry. In a book picked up during his European travels, he wrote:

*"Never to take the harsher way  
When love will do the deed."*

and these words may be taken as the index of his character. In 1899 the church celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of his pastorate, and at this service, Dr. William W. Pharr and Dr. Jethro Rumple, classmates of Dr. Wood, were the speakers. His death on April the second, 1900, brought deep personal sorrow to his city and state.

"After the death of Dr. Wood, the Rev. A. J. McKelway served the church until Dr. Richards was installed. Dr. McKelway was a man of great originality and he left a lasting impression upon the people who learned to love him during his brief service here.

"Dr. C. M. Richards was installed pastor December

## HISTORY OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

9, 1900. He continued in office until 1908 when he resigned to accept the call to the Davidson College Church. Dr. Richards maintained the scholarly traditions of this pulpit and combined with his powers as a preacher the pastoral gifts that made him greatly beloved. To his other services, he added exceptional business and executive abilities and under his ministry the church grew rapidly in membership and liberality. He is a graduate of Davidson College and Columbia Seminary.

"The Rev. J. M. Wharey served the church as Stated Supply for some months after Dr. Richards' resignation. His ministry here was very happy and he left a multitude of friends."

Dr. Charles Edward Raynal, the 28th minister to lead the Old Fourth Creek Congregation, is the son of Pierre N. Raynal, who was born at St. Marie Aux Mines in the Vosges Mountains of Alsace, France. His mother was Anna Girardeau Raynal, a descendant of the French Huguenots, who, on the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, fled from France to South Carolina. Dr. Raynal was born in Savannah, Ga., and completed his education at Princeton when Woodrow Wilson was president and Henry Van Dyke a professor.

Our Parson is a lover of birds and trees, carved wood, and tooled books, but most of all he loves the Lord.

In 1909, he became pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Statesville. His thirty years of service have turned his dark hair to silvery gray; but in these years he has built well, not only the old rock wall set in cement, secure for a hundred years. He has supervised stone by stone, trowel of mortar, by trowel of mortar, the construction of our sixth church that now stands on ground consecrated by 175 years of serving and seeking God.

This hand-wrought church was begun in 1921 with Mr. N. B. Mills, Chairman of the Building Committee. The first service was held July 26, 1924, with Dr. Raynal's sermon from the text: "I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord. . . . Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good.'"

Time is up I know, but how can one leave off the list of men who have entered the ministry from this church and the elders who have upheld the pastors' hands throughout the years. How many and how faithful the deacons who have waited on their ministry? And what of the long line of devoted women, who have broken their alabaster boxes of ointment on His feet?







## HISTORY OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

### MINISTERS

J. R. Roseboro, D. D.	Leigh R. Scott, D. D.
R. D. Stimson	W. H. Matheson
Ernest Caldwell, D. D.	Wade H. Allison
Lewis Bostain	William Andrew Wood, Grand-
Paschal Bradley	son of W. A. Wood, D. D.
H. R. Overcash	Charles E. Raynal, Jr.
Everett Phifer	W. Bonner Knox
John Harper Brady	John Robert Smith

Can we claim A. S. Caldwell, McK. R. Long and McDowell Richards, D. D., who in childhood or youth were members of this congregation?













